

Where to go for help with heating bills

Bill payment assistance is available for Montanans from the state's Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) and from Energy Share of Montana. Some utilities also provide bill discounts to customers who are receiving LIEAP assistance.

To apply for either LIEAP or Energy Share assistance, call the human resource development agency in your area.

GLENDIVE—Action For Eastern Montana
1-800-488-3587

HAVRE—District IV HRDC
1-800-640-6743

GREAT FALLS—Opportunities Inc.
1-800-927-2270

LEWISTOWN—District VI HRDC
1-800-766-3018

BILLINGS—District VII HRDC
1-800-433-1411

HELENA—Rocky Mtn Devel. Council
1-800-356-6544

BOZEMAN—District XI HRDC
1-800-332-2796

KALISPELL—NW MT Resource Council
1-800-344-5979

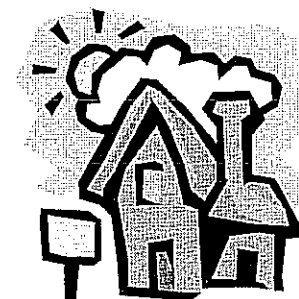
MISSOULA—District XI HRDC
1-406-728-3710

BUTTE—District XII HRDC
1-800-382-1325

The PSC expects regulated utilities to satisfactorily resolve their customers' complaints. If you are not satisfied with the company's response, contact the PSC.

Montana Public Service Commission
1701 Prospect Ave
PO Box 202601
Helena, MT 59620-2601
1-800-646-6150

Energy Utility Service Rules



Deposits

The utility company can ask you to pay a deposit for any of these reasons:

- ✓ your credit history is unsatisfactory;
- ✓ your utility service has been shut off for nonpayment within the last year;
- ✓ you have received 2 or more disconnect notices from a utility in the last year;
- ✓ you have a past due bill owing to a utility;
- ✓ you live with a former customer of the utility at the same address he/she incurred a still-unpaid bill owing the utility;
- ✓ you have tampered with your utility service without authorization within the past 5 years.

You have the option to provide a guarantor for the account rather than pay a cash deposit.

The deposit amount cannot be more than twice your average monthly bill. The utility will pay 6% annual interest on your deposit, and will refund your deposit plus interest when you have paid your bill on time for 12 months, or upon termination of service.



Shutoffs

A utility may terminate your service when:

- ✓ you haven't paid a past due bill;
- ✓ you have broken a payment agreement;
- ✓ you fraudulently obtained service, or tampered with your utility service, or are violating rules that protect public safety;
- ✓ you refuse the utility access to your property when there is a need for it.

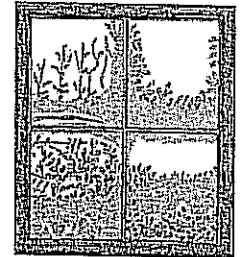
Utility service cannot be shut off for non-payment on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, a legal holiday, or the day before a holiday. Shutoffs may take place only between 8 a.m. and noon.

The utility must give you written notice of shutoff for non-payment. You can avoid shutoff by either paying the past due bill in full or by entering into a deferred payment agreement with the company. If you break a payment agreement, the utility does not have to enter into another agreement with you.

Special Winter Rules

From November 1 to April 1, a regulated utility may not shut off your service without prior PSC approval. The PSC does not approve winter shutoffs if the customer is unable to pay (as demonstrated by being a recipient of a public assistance program) or if a member of the

customer's household is either over 62 years old or is handicapped. It is your responsibility to inform the utility if one or more of these circumstances exist in your household.



Often, a low-income customer will rely totally on energy assistance programs to pay his or her winter utility bill, only to discover in April that a large balance owing the utility has built up, and the company is demanding payment. The customer who makes the effort to pay something toward his or her utility bill during the winter, on top of what the energy assistance program pays, will not only have a smaller balance due in the spring, but will be in better standing with the company when it comes time to make a deferred payment agreement.

Landlord/Tenant Situations

If you are a tenant and your landlord pays the utility bills, the utility must give you written notice of shutoff due to your landlord's non-payment at least 15 days before the shutoff date. You might want to obtain legal advice regarding your rights as a tenant.